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ABSTRACT

What is left for leadership in higher education beyond the processing and administration of management systems? Beyond the leadership of communication lies the leadership of ideas of what the university ought to try to do if it wants to be more than a training station or cultural ornament. The author's prescription for leadership has three parts. The first is that the leader needs to guide himself in terms of the best he can be as a person of reflection and originality. Second, the educational leader should be more knowledgeable than his faculty and his fellow administrators about what is going on in higher education. Third, the administrative leader, if he would lead, needs to spend most of his time studying and releasing the potentialities of the human beings with whom he is working. Planning is nothing more or less than the willingness to think out what is most important to do in education. (Author/PG)

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THE PRESIDENT'S ROLE

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PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

As a part of the continuing series of articles on governance in higher education, *Management Forum* presents Louis T. Benezet's address given at the Academy for Educational Development's Washington seminar for college and university presidents. The seminar dealt with the problems of strengthening leadership in higher education, and Dr. Benezet addressed himself to the strengthening of the presidential role. Dr. Benezet is President of the State University of New York at Albany.

ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP: OF WHAT OR OF WHOM?

by Louis T. Benezet

My mission here as I understand it is to discuss the residual possibilities for leadership in higher education. By the word residual I refer to the death of the old imperial presidency, wherever it once existed as indeed it did. You will have no funeral oration from me, however, on academic leadership. Something needs to be said about a newer kind of leadership which we hope is emerging. There is evidence that it has already been around for a while, and that to a large extent it is why colleges and universities for all their troubles are enrolling some nine million students from 16 to 80 in various forms of reasonably organized education. There are those among us who are not quite ready to accept the dictum that the college presidency is an illusion.

When a college administrator reads through what Mr. Millett properly calls the spate of literature on management in higher education; when one covers the full range, from the eloquent prose of Stephen Bailey now of the ACE, through the political statements of professors' unions and student assemblies, the statistical debunkings of Sandy Astin, the colleges without walls and other inventions of Sam Baskin's innovative consortium, the humanistic analyses of Father Andy Greeley or Edgar Friedenberg, the well-tailored yet essentially negative eassay on the presidency by Cohen and March, the Carnegie Commission's handy five-foot shelf, and finally the outpouring of management systems issuing from Boulder, Colorado, (with that wonderfully onamatopoetic acronym, NCHEMS) when as I said the administrator surveys all this, the only honest reaction becomes a sort of helpless laughter. One person who has caught the confusion better than most is Harold Enarson of Ohio State University. To steal from his quote in a recent issue of *The Educational Record*:

> . . .We fail to grasp the essentials of the university. It is not 'just another organization,' *it is a very special kind of place.* It is more like the Metropolitan Opera than the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. It is more like a church than a factory; more like a research lab than the Highway Department. The university is an intensely human enterprise, and it is not so much managed as it is led.

Here, then, is the question before us. Can a university be led? The present freshet of management doctrine begs the question by asserting that information systems, cost analysis, cost effectiveness, productivity in degrees measured by programs rather than by departments, and all the rest are necessary forms of leadership if colleges and universities are to survive. The evidence is plain enough that this is true. Yet is this leadership? Or is it a general move-in of educational mechanics, telling us that if the university wants to stay alive it had better learn modern academic bookkeeping after having avoided it for too many centuries? From four years in a state university system that suddenly found its sky-blue ceiling closed over, I can testify that management information systems have become sober gospel. In brief, we have learned to proceed

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with less, by means of a form of academic blood-letting called inner resource allocation. I am not content, however, that it has entitled me to be called a leader of my university. To my thinking the term leadership predicates a leadership of *whom* rather than a leadership of *what*.

My thesis is that through introduction of management systems we have by necessity brought in a leadership of the *what*, but not yet of the *whom*. Faculty and students concede the *what* in varying degree. They read the annual University budget requests for schools and departments and they see what happens to those requests after the Legislature or the Board has finished its work. To the extent that the institution annually survives running the gauntlet through the State Legislature or the Board, it might be said that we have exercised a leadership of something. There is not great evidence, however, that the process has been accompanied by an improving leadership of administrators of faculty and students as human beings concerned with the purpose and content of education.

Editor George Bonham, in the April 1974 edition of *CHANGE*, writes of NYU's epic struggle back toward solvency. He clearly implies that the rather bloody task of management surgery which had to be done brought the people of that university together under the leadership of President Hester. None who has followed the story of NYU's revival would be inclined to be skeptical. As Bonham writes, "NYU now works hard towards achieving concrete and widely shared goals," and further, "The NYU spirit is punctuated by an ambitious $300 million fund-raising campaign . . . ", and, "There is a surprising upturn in NYU's freshman applications and enrollments." Perhaps one could say from this, Q.E.D. If things become tough enough and the administration meets that toughness with full disclosure, full participation, a readiness to make hard decisions and to follow through with management, the people of the university will rally round their leader.

Must there then be a financial crisis in order for the university to accept leadership? And if it does accept leadership, does it accept it for more than the minimal necessities of staying financially alive?

That question, it seems to me, divides the respective approaches of Cohen and March's *Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President* and John Millett's *Strengthening Community in Higher Education*. Cohen and March would have us believe—and they artfully build their case for it—that the American college presidency is an illusion insofar as its ability to lead toward a fulfillment of common educational purposes is concerned. Cohen and March mix in modern existentialism and the philosophy of the absurd along with sociological data on the contemporary presidency. Their counsel about living with a tolerance for ambiguity, for using the garbage-can answer for various disputes which can't otherwise be resolved, their advocacy for sense mixed with foolishness as inevitable in decision-making—these words are useful if not inspiring. They also could perhaps reflect the fact that neither Cohen nor March has served as a college president. After twenty-six years at it I somehow believe that on certain occasions the president is looked to to pull common purposes together; to lead decisions toward sense and to identify the consequences of foolishness. This no doubt illustrates that presidents, especially old ones, live under illusion as Cohen and March say.

Millett, on the other hand, lines out a premise that could hardly be more explicit (Chapter 4, Management): "Above all else a college or a university is an enterprise to perform work, often several different kinds of work." In order to perform work one must know the kind of work he is expected to do. Note that Millett did not say that a university has a spread of colleges and schools and departments which have work to do; he sticks with the collective noun, university. He goes on from there to identify university work in terms of purposes. Whether or not those purposes are ever achieved or even perceived in the leadership of the president, Millett can no more prove than can you or I or others who have tried it. What he is saying, I believe, is that the purposes are there, and we have the job of trying to bring the resources of the university together in order to fulfill them.

If we deny that a university can discuss its purposes, especially its priorities of what is important, then we confirm how helpless we are to comment on the national debate over whether higher education is primarily for personal intellectual growth or whether it is aimed at preparing people for useful careers. The Newman Report is one of a current barrage of attacks upon the traditional academic goals of the university, and a plea for consumerism in higher education. Such consumerism notes that college professors are mainly interested in projecting their own expertise in a particular field of knowledge, whether or not it is of use to the majority of students in their classes. Against that the argument is made that federal and state aid should go direct to the student and let him choose the kind of education that best serves his purposes.

Such a view is popular with students I have talked with. They don't reject general education, however. They say they understand what general education is all about, better than our generation did, judging by the results. They say they can take care of that themselves through books, films, museums, travel, "happenings," meditation, and rapping, and perhaps also through taking courses with teachers whose viewpoints they respect. Career success in the current era is seen as competitive. The job situations grows tighter; the national and world gaps between the haves and the have-nots becomes wider. One needs something to sell in the job market. The pressure is on to succeed in order to have the affluence one needs to live that life-style he wants: again the tired phrase, in order to do his thing.

Consumerism in higher education thus strikes a bargain between career-training as directed by the specialist teacher, whether he be biochemist or cabinet-maker, and maximum freedom during the rest of the student's time in order to practice living as he wishes and he will insist—learning whatever he considers impelling for him to learn. The picture is practical and superficially persuasive. It confirms present writers on higher education who deny that the university in the modern day can afford the folly of a set of common purposes, toward which management then will attempt in its lumbering fashion to move.

Any president, vice president, or dean with a few years behind him has learned the humility of knowing that what he personally can do to lead the thought of his colleagues is limited. About all the fun that is left in administration is to keep trying. The excuse for trying is not a presumption that he has more wisdom about what should be learned than a pro-

fessor on his campus has. It is in the fact that his job consists not only in getting together the resources so that the university can do its work. It also consists in trying to see what the university is achieving in its impact upon the lives of its students and faculty and, through their experience, upon the society. The president is the person who must care most about these things.

In order to know something about outcomes, the president needs abundant data. He also needs a device for feeding those data into some kind of consistent interpretation. That device happens still to be best supplied by a three-pound mass of organic tissue known as the individual human brain. Preferably it will be lodged in the president's head.

If a university were in fact to become a collection of career-training stations, festooned by libraries, art galleries, concert halls, theatre stages, meditation cells and rapping lounges, then the only leadership we should need is one best fulfilled through a course in city management with an emphasis upon utility services and space utilization, especially parking. I don't think that is all a university is supposed to be. I don't think that is all that most students and faculty want it to be.

What do they want it to be?

One illustration of our confusion can be seen on the front page of the March 18 (1974) issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The center article on page one has as its lead, "Signs of a Counter-Reformation Hearten Academic Conservatives." The article reports the resurgence of professors who are moving toward the reinstitution of specific course requirements, grades, and traditional disciplines such as the classics. Immediately below that front-page article is another article entitled, "Improve Teaching, Prevent Stagnation, Group Urges." This article reports the work of an organization known as The Group for Human Development in Higher Education. Among other things it traces growing demands for a broader emphasis upon humanistic teaching, upon the elimination of grades, upon ending the conflict between the professor's identity and the student's identity, and upon such devices as "colleague groups based on shared interests in certain puzzlements, social problems, methodologies, areas of the world, or philosophical approaches." It might be interesting to invite the writers of concurrent articles in *The Chronicle* to get together and discuss what is happening in higher education.

I cite these examples to remind us that not much over the decades has changed. Educators can always find whatever they want to find is happening within anything so vast, so multidimensional as American higher education. For all the accumulations of data-systems, we have not yet solved the equation of human value-judgments as to what should be attempted in the college experience.

Herein, I submit, lies the call for leadership. Without it a university comes close to intellectual chaos, as Hutchins forty years ago claimed it to be. I don't mean that a university needs to be organized along some regimen that denies variety and conflict; without these there could be no progress in human discovery. The point is one of creative thought itself as a central motive. Thirty years ago in a little booklet called *Mission of the University*, Ortega y Gasset pointed out the task for leadership in the university that is as badly needed today as it was then:

> "Life is chaos, a tangled and confused jungle in which man is lost. But his mind reacts against the sensation of bewilderment: he labors to find 'roads,' 'ways' through the woods, and for the form of clear, firm ideas concerning the universe, positive convictions about the nature of things. The ensemble or system of these ideas is culture in the true sense of the term; it is precisely the opposite of external ornament. Culture is what saves human lives from being a mere disaster; it is what enables man to live a life which is something above meaningless tragedy or inward disgrace."

Ortega continues his discussion with the sentence, "We cannot live on the human level without ideas."

What then can we conclude is left for leadership in higher education beyond the processing and administration of management systems? John Millett in his monograph points to one answer when he goes beyond the justification of authority for leadership to state, "But leadership requires more than legitimacy; it requires acceptability." He builds a structure for that acceptability, providing a sample university charter of purposes, and a construction for a university identified as a strong University Community Council, over whose executive committee the president presides.

What we are saying is not disparagement of management. It has received its due. It is necessary for institutional survival. It is needed to remind faculty and students of the competition that lies ahead among the tax-supported agencies of society which must do their work within the limitations of a finite state budget and finite philanthropy. The leadership of communication has barely begun on campus: a leadership which will promote a better understanding of management systems as being more than a goad of administrative oppression. Right now the faculty still regard the words as a symbol of the enemy in their midst. Most of us have not passed through a trauma like that of NYU which brought the truths home to a university community at one climactic time.

Beyond the leadership of communication lies the leadership of ideas of what the university ought to try to do if it wants to be more than a scattered landscape of training stations and cultural ornaments. If I had been asked to give two speeches rather than one, the second would have been concerned with the requirements of the leader as an analyst of human nature in group enterprise. My discussion will end with an appeal that the study of human nature and its response become the main theatre of decision as to whether an administration can capture his chance to help the institution become a place of intellectual movement or whether he remains a caretaker over the place.

My prescription for the chance of leadership in the human sense has three parts. None of them is original. Each one the administrative life will tend to crush out of us if we let it. The first is that the leader needs to guide himself in terms of the best he can be as a person of reflective thought with a grain of originality. That is not something that comes by contact like the heat from an electric blanket. The leader has to work to maintain the necessities of physical health, intellectual interests outside college administration, and a certain decent membership in his own family and among his friends.

Second, the educational leader should outread his faculty and his fellow administrators in what is going on concerning the movements of higher education. (Don't ask me when.) The difference between the years when I started out and the present is that higher education has acquired a respectable body of knowledge, both in amount and importance. Some of it still reflects personal whim, some patent nonsense. Most of it, however, reports solid accomplishment going on in some working institution, and solid ideas being worked on by thinking people.

Third, the administrative leader, if he would lead, needs to spend most of his time studying and releasing the potentialities of the human beings with whom he is given to work. This varies all the way from the receptionist whom he greets in the morning to the trustees, legislators, and townsfolk he sees at downtown luncheons and weekend cocktail parties. Between the range of contacts the main body of attention will go to his fellow administrators, to the faculty whom he meets in his weekly rounds, and to all the students he can reasonably come to know without succumbing to the Old Prexy syndrome. From these people will come the answers of what it is possible to accomplish in his institution. We work with people where we find them. We work with a basic humility about imperfections, starting with ourselves. We need to find the assets that each can bring to the job and to adjust for the liabilities. (Obviously all this must, let us admit, bypass the delicate and difficult topic of faculty academic tenure.)

Finally, a parting prejudice on the theory of planning: it is commonly said that what we need most of all in modern universities are better and bigger offices of planning. My position is that there is one principle office of planning in the university: it resides in the president's head. Tools, helpers, experts, and agencies aplenty are needed to supply him with data, bulletins, management information systems, NCHEMS, and anything else you like so that the planning can stay on track. *But planning is nothing more or less than the willingness to think out what is most important to try to do in education.* If anyone gets ahead of the president in that exercise, then it is time for him to resign. If he loses his zest for ideas of what can be qualitatively good, socially worthwhile, individually stimulating and, to be sure, financially practicable, then "he's through, my man, he's through."

If on the other hand he can keep these qualities alive, then perhaps with luck the administrator can become a leader not only of *what*, but of *whom*: in other words, leader of the aspirations of the human community with whom he keeps a rather fragile covenant.

More important than the president's current report card as a leader is the educational progress of the institution in the years after he has gone. Did it move forward as a place which added to the quality of life or, should we say now, to the survival of civilization?

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